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SUBJECT: CHARGE DINGER CONSULTS WITH UN ON BURMA

REF: RANGOON 164

11. (SBU) Summary. U.S. Charge to Rangoon Larry Dinger met with UN Special Advisor Gambari and representatives from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UN Development Program (UNDP) and the Open Society Institute (OSI) during his March 16 consultations in New York. Discussions included SYG Ban's possible trip to Burma and UNHCR, OCHA, and UNDP's thoughts on expanding their assistance programs in Burma. End Summary.

Gambari

12. (SBU) In a March 16 meeting with U.S. Charge to Burma Larry Dinger, UN Special Advisor Gambari stressed that while the Security Council and the Group of Friends share long-term objectives for Burma, there is no shared approach. He said the Chinese argue that the regime's roadmap ensures stability. Gambari said he argues the opposite, adding that only an inclusive process will ensure stability -- a principle Gambari claims could motivate the Chinese to pressure the regime, particularly as elections approach. Gambari said Secretary General Ban has accepted UK advice that he should visit Burma soon; however, Ban realizes the trip would require careful preparation, agreement on "expectations" and appropriate timing. Gambari told the Charge that the Burmese junta hopes to delay a visit from Ban, suggesting that the regime might be considering what it could offer or might be waiting for the U.S. to complete its policy review. Gambari wanted Washington to be aware of the latter possibility.

UNHCR and OCHA

13. (SBU) UNHCR Senior Policy Advisor Brian Gorlick told Dinger that High Commissioner Guterres "saw everything he needed to see" on his trip to Burma and characterized the visit as a success. He echoed post's report (ref) regarding the expansion of UNHCR activities in Northern Rakhine State. While the plan lacks specifics, the GOB indicated willingness for UN agencies to address a number of important grassroots issues. Gorlick acknowledged that the devil would be in the details. Gorlick said the UNHCR remains in a "reasonably healthy" financial position for operations in the country, but noted that if the operations are expanded to cover growing needs of vulnerable populations, UNHCR will have to seek further donor funding. He said that the Burmese extended an invitation to work in the southeast portion of the country and UNHCR is developing a proposal for programs in this region.

14. (SBU) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Officer Ivan Lupis commented on the usefulness of expanding the humanitarian space created in the post-Nargis delta outward, particularly into NRS, home of the Rohingyas. However, he noted resistance to expanding the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) mandate from some ASEAN members, specifically

Singapore, which sees the TCG as specifically created for cyclone disaster relief. Lupis said UN sources in Rangoon report the regime intends to make the visa process "more cumbersome" by compelling international NGOs to report on what they've accomplished, what they plan to do, and provide a list of who will be working on projects. Visa applications could take 1 to 2 months under the proposed regime.

UNDP

15. (SBU) UNDP Deputy Assistant Administrator for Asia Liagia Elizondo noted that the UNDP Executive Board (of which the U.S. is a member) restricts the scope of activity and resources for Burma. For the current 2008-2010 program, UNDP can employ up to \$25 million in regular/core resources and another \$25 million in non-core resources (earmarked contributions to UNDP); the scope of the program is limited to human development activities, and UNDP is prohibited from working directly with the Burma Government. UNDP intends to ask the Board to allow it to spend up to an additional \$55 million in non-core resources during 2008-2010.

16. (SBU) Elizondo said UNDP is interested in expanding its Burma program into areas such as livelihoods, food security, micro finance, disaster risk reduction, governance, and other MDG related activities. These areas would require some UNDP cooperation with the Burmese Government at least at the village and township levels. While there would be political sensitivities for Burma and donors alike, Elizondo argued that UNDP has experience in dealing with such matters, and it is important to plant seeds for a democratic future. That could be done by degrees, starting "under the radar."

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According to Elizondo, Capitol Hill staffer Paul Grove recently met with UNDP Director of the Bureau for Asia and the Pacific Ajay Chibber and gave the impression that there might now be better Congressional support for some expansion of the scope of the UNDP Burma program.

Open Society Institute

17. (SBU) Director of the OSI Burma Project Maureen Aung Thwin told Charge Dinger that OSI is convening a Burma donor's forum in New York shortly to identify challenges, discuss the way forward, and coordinate grants to avoid (where possible) "double dipping." Governmental donors are not invited. She said the group normally meets every 18 months but bases meetings on need rather than timing. The donors last met in November. She said OSI's specific budget for Burma doubled as a result of Cyclone Nargis and totals USD 2 million. For some projects OSI also dips into the Southeast Asia and other pots. She noted reports that Senior General Than Shwe suggested to Indonesian President Yudhoyono a concern about being brought before a "tribunal" if democracy were to come to Burma. Aung Thwin offered several possibilities for increased engagement, which she favors, including official cultural exchanges and scholarship programs. She recommended quietly engaging to learn what is possible in exchange for lifting sanctions, which she believes are effective for the most part, "or why would the regime always ask for them to be lifted?"

18. (SBU) Charge d'Affaires to Burma Larry Dinger has reviewed this cable.  
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